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AN

ESSAY

ON THE

LITERARY BEAUTIES OF THE SCRIPTURES.

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IN this age of taſte and refinement, when the elegant writers of Greece and Rome are ſo deſervedly eſteemed, and have been ſo much the ſubject of learned diſquiſition, that there is ſcarce an obſcurity in them, which is not in ſome degree illuſtrated, or a beauty, which has not been called forth to public view and admiration; in ſuch an age, that ſeems more diſpoſed to contemplate and examine the productions of others, than to add to them by its own; it is natural to conclude, that there would be no path throughout the whole extent of ſcience, that has not been travelled over by the eager ſtep of literary curioſity, no flowery road in the gay regions of poetry, nor thorny one in the dreary wilderneſs of philoſophy, which imagination has not penetrated, or ſtudious and patient aſſiduity explored. And this is in fact the caſe; criticiſm has pervaded every province of knowledge, and brought the whole

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world of letters to the teſt; the ancients and moderns have paſſed in review before her ſevere eye; all pretenſions to literary diſtinction have been examined, impoſtures have been detected, obſcure worth brought forward into the light, and the particular merits of each reſpective author have been adjudged and decided; in ſhort, the character of theſe times, in a learned point of view, ſeems to be this: the human intellect, which has been hitherto in a progreſſive ſtate, and making more or leſs rapid advances towards perfection, now at length appears as it were to check itſelf in its career, in order to look back upon the country that it has traverſed, to make an eſtimate of all its acquiſitions, and having judiciouſly ſeparated what is valuable from what is not ſo, to put forth into obſervation, whatever may be uſeful to the purpoſes of ſociety, whatever may improve the underſtanding, or amend the heart.

Amongſt other diſquiſitions of a critical kind, that evince eminent knowledge and ingenuity, we may with juſtice claſs the writings of a truly good and great man, who, with abilities and piety, that render him equally the ornament of the literary and religious world, hath ſtept forth the amiable friend of Revelation, to recommend it in a new light to mankind, and has proved by his works, that Learning and Religion are no leſs united in ſacred writing, than by his life he has proved them to be ſo in himſelf. While ſome of our men of ſtudy and ſcience were labouring in mathematical reſearches, ſome engaged in purſuing the ſubtle clew of metaphyſical abſtraction, and ſome more pleaſingly employed in removing the veil, which time or ignorance had drawn over the beauties of ancient authors, this worthy prelate enlarged more uſefully the circle

circle of polite literature, by extending it to religion, and deduced new ſprings of intellectual pleaſure from that fount, which God himſelf opened as well poſſibly for the entertainment as for the uſe of man. Real merit ſhould ever be acknowledged; but we are moſt diſpoſed to acknowledge it, when, as in the preſent caſe, the loſs of it is moſt painfully to be apprehended.

It is the deſign of this eſſay to take advantage of this worthy example, which has been ſet us, and to ſolicit for the Scriptures a place at leaſt, if not the higheſt rank in the literary ſtudies of mankind. The ſacred writings have been hitherto conſidered too much in a ſingle point of view, as diſtinct from all other things, and having no reference and analogy to, or communion with them: they have therefore been ſet apart, and confined within their own peculiar province by a ſeparation no leſs religiouſly preſerved, than that of the Levites of old, from the reſt of the people. But is it inſtruction only, that is to be looked for in them? May they not be conſidered a little comparatively with other arts and ſciences, without any diminution of their worth and dignity? May they not enlarge their empire from the heart to the underſtanding, and aſſiſt at leaſt, if not preſide, in cultivating and embelliſhing the mind with thoſe graces, which crown the man of letters?

It is for bigotted ſuperſtition to ſeek a refuge in monaſteries, and to cloiſter itſelf from the public eye; it is for falſe religion to ſeek the aid of arms, and to conſtrain rather than to perſuade obedience; it is for pagan idolatry, conſcious of impoſture, to humble herſelf at the feet of Learning, and beg its connivance

connivance, (whoſe blind aſſent it could not have;) but Revelation ſhrinks not from the teſt, ſhe comes forward, and offers herſelf to every examination, being well aſſured, that ſhe need be known only, in order to be owned and admired, and ſhe demands no leſs the reverence of profound erudition, than of profound ignorance. If then ſuch be the Religion, which we profeſs and enjoy, (as truly it is) ſhould it not be carried into all our purſuits and ſpeculations, become the guide and director of our ſtudies, and ſo mix with our lives, that they may take their whole tincture and complexion from it!

But inſtead of ſpeaking thus generally, it will be proper to mark out, with what preciſion and accuracy the nature and ſcope of this deſign will admit, the grounds on which theſe its pretenſions are founded: and if there be juſt cauſe to expect the Scriptures ſhould improve our underſtanding, as well as our principles, that they ſhould exalt the mind, as well as mend the heart, and raiſe and elevate our ſentiments, where reaſon and philoſophy fail us, there will then be abundant reaſon for our delighting in the word of God, as well as believing it, and for contemplating the Beauties of it, as well as revering its truths.

Allow me then to claſs our enquiries under the three heads of Sentiment, Diction, and Regularity of Plan; in which principally, all literary excellence ſeems to conſiſt; and if, in the proſecution of this attempt, the natural flow and current of thought be rather purſued, than the ſtrict rules of art and method, it is humbly hoped that an allowance will be made, or rather indulgence given, to the deſign, and to the age and inexperience of the

the writer, rather than exactneſs and accuracy be required in the execution.

To begin then with Sentiment. Under this article is comprehended every conception of an intelligent being, whether it reſpect his opinions merely, or his principles, himſelf or others. Now all ſuch as are contained in the works of the learned, however recommended by their excellence and beauty, cannot, or at leaſt ſhould not, have that weight and influence with us, which thoſe of Scripture lay claim to and receive; for the former are grounded on weaker authority than the latter: theſe are of man, who is fallible, thoſe of an infallible God: and indeed ſhould the truth of both be equally apparent, ſtill our eſtimation of the author is generally carried on to the work, and gains it a greater degree of veneration and obſervance, than we ſhould otherwiſe pay it. Scriptural Sentiment therefore has this advantage over human, that it comes recommended to our cloſeſt attention by the dignity of its ſource and origin.

But when it is thus introduced in the beſt manner to our notice, what means has it of engaging our affections and ſecuring to itſelf a permanent attention? Does not it want that grace and delicacy, that ſtrength and ſublimity, that purity and pathos, which ſo much recommend the claſſical writers to all men of true taſte and learning? It is readily granted, that the doctrines of the Holy Records are true; but are they ſuch as fill an improved mind with thoſe pleaſing ſenſations, which polite literature always communicates? Let the bleſſed Revealer of our Religion plead its merits in this reſpect, and be

conſulted

conſulted for the purpoſe in his heavenly teachings! And theſe if we examine in this view, we ſhall find them to abound with genuine marks of his own divine nature: for from ſo pure a fount, what, that is not of a correſpondent excellence, could flow?

Nor is the ſpirit of their Maſter leſs perceivable in the Prophets, Apoſtles, and Evangeliſts. Let us attend Paul in his very celebrated apology, and agree with Agrippa, that he need make no other appeal! The learning, the ſtrength of reaſoning, the conſtraining, and yet graceful eloquence of this great man and chriſtian, may well be thought even ſuperior to that moſt renowned Athenian Orator Demoſthenes. Thoſe that admire Xenophon's perſpicuity and elegance, may find them in Luke: for where does Truth appear in a more becoming dreſs, than when ſet forth by him with a naked ſimplicity, and moſt artleſs manner of narration?

Do we require to have our Paſſions excited? There are various paſſages in Scripture, that muſt affect the coldeſt, and ſoften the moſt obdurate heart. If we have not read Medea's Farewell to her Children without feeling, have we read David's Lamentation over his ſon without it, or our bleſſed Saviour's over Jeruſalem? But particulars cannot be comprehended in a work of this kind. Suffice it to obſerve in general, that Euripides, though the greateſt maſter of the pathetic among the ancients, falls ſhort of the weeping Prophet Jeremiah; who has theſe great advantages over the Grecian, that he both felt the ſorrows, which he hath ſo tenderly deſcribed, and was aſſiſted by God himſelf in the deſcription of them.

Beſides

Beſides, the writings of the one make a deeper impreſſion on us, than thoſe of the other; becauſe we are only voluntarily intereſted in the latter, but naturally and neceſſarily in the former. The fictitious tale of the Tragedian is adopted into our concern, but the true narration of the Man of God demands our affections of fear and pity with an authority, which will not be reſiſted. We ſhudder at the judgments, that are repreſented as impending over Judea, and the more ſo, when we behold Sin and Irreligion, the ſad cauſes of them, abound ſo much in Britain; the horror and grief excited become peculiarly our own, and in feeling for the Jews, we feel for ourſelves.

Again, where ſhall we look for the ſublimity of ſenſe, the heavenly majeſty, and the awful beauties of Iſaiah in the claſſical world? Pindar, who ſtands firſt of the ancients in this ſpecies of writing, is left far behind, and cannot reach in his moſt noble flights him, "who roſe on Seraph wing," and "whoſe hallowed lips were touched with ſacred fire." Do we want wiſdom and inſtruction? We ſhall do wrong to go for it to the academic groves, when we can obtain it at the mouth of ſuch a Moraliſt as Solomon. What uſeful leſſons for life are here delivered, what a lantern is held up to guide our feet! In this faithful mirror, we may find a truer and more accurate repreſentation of the human heart and its principles of action, than hiſtory, obſervation and experience could ſupply.

But it may not be amiſs, before we quit the ſubject of Scriptural Sentiment, to examine it ſomewhat more cloſely in the two branches of Declarations and Precepts; which I the

rather ſelect for particular diſcuſſion, becauſe they ſeem to contain the two chief ſources of intellectual pleaſure, "the Great "and the Excellent." In order to illuſtrate them, it will be neceſſary to encroach on the province of Diction, which perhaps may be the more allowable, as the examples thence taken, will be conſidered with a view, not merely to the expreſſion, but the ideas conveyed under it.

And firſt, the declarations of Scripture inſpire the moſt exalted ſenſations, that we are capable of, and fill the ſoul with pleaſing wonder and aſtoniſhment. We need only examine them as they preſent to us the Supreme Being, in order to be convinced of this. Are we terrified at the giant ſtrides of Homer's Neptune, "under which the mountains trembled," or at the nod of his Jupiter, "by which the whole heavens were ſhaken?" With what ſuperior awe and dignity does Jehovah riſe upon us, either when firſt introduced to us in the wonderful works of Creation, ſaying, "Let there be light and there was light," or when he bowed the heavens and came down to mount Sinai, "and it quaked greatly, and the ſmoke thereof aſcended as the ſmoke of a furnace!" Pinder's Jove, "ſits enthroned on clouds," but "does he make his pavilion round about him with dark waters, and thick clouds of the ſky?" Is he "clothed with light as with a garment?" Hath he ſtretched out the heavens as a curtain, and laid the beams of his chambers in the waters?" It is not eaſy to collect and enumerate all the grand repreſentations of God in Scripture. "He is the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity;" in whoſe ſight, a thouſand years are but as yeſterday;" ſo pure and holy, "that the very heavens are unclean before him;" ſo powerful

ful, "that he killeth and maketh alive;" of ſuch omniſcience, "that he knoweth the thoughts of man afar off;" and of ſuch mercy and goodneſs, "that he waiteth to be gracious and to forgive." In this preſence, as it were, of the true and living God, how does the whole ſyſtem of Pagan ſuperſtition melt away, as miſt before the morning Sun! Theſe deſcriptions of him as far tranſcend the deſcriptions of Jupiter and Olympus, which the poets give us, as the thunder and lightning of the heavens do the rattling and flaſhes of Salmoneus. The Idol, ſet up by poetical invention, is no longer reverenced, and only ſerves to ſhew, how unable man was to form any juſt and proper conceptions of his Creator.

And here it may be obſerved, that philoſophy in all her reſearches and reaſonings from the effect to the cauſe, could never have raiſed God in our ideas, as the Sacred Writings have done; becauſe it would require a penetration and comprehenſion of mind far beyond any human attainment ſo to trace the ſecret and myſterious clew, which leads from the works to the great author of nature; and in no other way is it poſſible for mere man to proceed towards a knowledge of heavenly things. But our Religion has at once revealed, what the labour of ages would have in vain attempted to diſcover; it has opened a new world to us, and pointed out the Supreme Ruler of the univerſe in all his perfections, both as he is in himſelf, and as he is in relation to us his creatures. It tells us that "the inhabitants of the earth are in his ſight as graſshoppers," whole nations only as the ſmall duſt of the balance, "and that he maketh the judges thereof as vanity." What noble and ſtriking imagery is here, which has the more effect with us, as the ſubject

of it ſo naturally concerns us! May we not then fairly conclude from theſe few ſpecimens, that there is in the Sacred Writings an inexhauſtible ſource of all that refined pleaſure, which great and exalted minds receive from the ſublime!

After having taken this view of our God, let us (as indeed we always ſhould) bring our minds, whilſt impreſſed with awe and veneration, to the precepts appointed by him for our obſervance. For who, that fears the Lawgiver, can deſpiſe the law? This ſyſtem of obedience, if we trace it from Paradiſe down to the chriſtian æra, we ſhall find to have paſſed through ſeveral variations, and to have been altered and enlarged gradually, till by the Son of God it was at length brought to its greateſt comprehenſion and perfection: it began with Adam, by forbidding him the tree of knowledge, it revived with Noah, by forbidding blood, it afterwards enjoined circumciſion to Abraham in addition to the former prohibition; but at mount Sinai, it firſt took a regular form and became both enlarged and general, and then, after the intervention of ſome centuries, received on the mount of Olives its full and final completion.

If we look upon it in its yet imperfect ſtate as a body of laws preſcribed for the Jewiſh Hierarchy, we cannot but perceive and acknowledge the Divine Author, inaſmuch as it ſtrikes at the very root of all vice, and is marked throughout with a ſpirit of ſanctity, which was lamentably deficient in the beſt and wiſeſt heathen legiſlatures. But how improved, exalted and purified have we received it from Jeſus! The Scriptural Precepts, as he preſents them to us, are the genuine emanations of the Godhead, and of themſelves ſufficient to ſilence and confound

confound all the cavils of infidelity; for obſerve their ſuperiority over thoſe of human teaching! Philoſophy could enjoin us "to worſhip God, but Chriſtianity adds, "in ſpirit and in truth." If that could tell us "to love our neighbour," this goes further, and deſcribes the meaſure of ſuch love, in the words, "as ourſelves." The one could require us, "to do good to our friends," the other "to our enemies likewiſe." And ſo throughout the whole tenor of them there is an evident perfection, which human reaſon, in its moſt improved ſtate, neither attained, nor was able to attain. How far it could carry man, we ſee in the examples given, and we therefore know, to whom we are to aſcribe our farther guidance and progreſs in the grand duties of Religion and Morality, to him truly, who firſt lighted up the lamp of underſtanding within us, and knows the very inmoſt ſecrets of the ſoul. Plato and Iſocrates are moſt deſervedly eſteemed, and they juſtly demand our admiration, though they have ceaſed from being the chief ſources, whence inſtruction is to be drawn, ever ſince a greater maſter of the heart than they, has condeſcended to teach mankind: and from his time, the mount of Olives became what the groves of the academy were before, and practical knowledge has been ſought in Judea inſtead of Athens.

Let us for a moment ſuppoſe ourſelves the auditors of the heavenly ſermon on the mount: How ſearching, and of what intrinſic excellence are the doctrines? They preſcribe not a mere outward ſhew of goodneſs, but an inward ſanctity; "they try the very heart and the reins," and require that the principle be good, in order that the action may be ſo. With what authority and eaſy eloquence, with what an evident concern for man,

man, are they addreſſed! With what pathetic exhortations, or awful menaces enforced! And laſtly, how fine is the imagery and ſolemn the ſenſe of the concluſion! "every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doeth them not, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh man, which built his houſe upon the ſand, and the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that houſe, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Surely the heathen Moraliſts need not bluſh to confeſs themſelves far outdone, both in regard to the quality of the precepts, and the mode of delivering them. Nor can theſe fail of affording the higheſt delight to men of letters and liberal minds, in whom the love of truth (implanted by God, in order to lead us into the path of duty and of happineſs) has been cheriſhed and cultivated; for whatever is truly excellent, has naturally a charm for the ſoul, and muſt appear amiable to it.

But it is time to cloſe this part of our ſubject. And indeed the tranſition is eaſy from Sentiment to Diction, from the very ſoul of all literary beauties to their external form and dreſs, without which they can have no viſible being or exiſtence; ſo neceſſary a connexion is there between words and ideas, and with ſo happy an union muſt they conſpire, in order to pleaſe and inſtruct. That ſuch is their friendly intercourſe, and ſuch the effects of it in the Sacred Writings, the few ſpecimens, that have been exhibited of Scriptural Diction, would lead us to conclude: but it will be proper to take a more general ſurvey of it.

The great excellence and ſecret of language conſiſts, in adapting the expreſſion to the ſenſe; or, as no common critic informs

us,

us, "in describing low things with nicety, great things with becoming gravity, and such as are equally removed from both extremes, in an equable and easy manner." Now the Scriptures are a wide field, in which all this variety of subjects may be found; and where else are they treated with equal propriety, and so agreeably to the above rule? If the minutiæ of the Jewish Law, or any other simple and more humble occurrence in Jewish history solicit our attention, they are related in a familiar way, and yet without the least coarseness or vulgarity; if the matter be grand and of a sublime nature, (as in the manifestations of the true God particularly) with what true majesty and force of Diction is it clothed? And if lastly, plain narrative of facts, or any other topic less elevated than the former be presented to us, a chaste perspicuity, and correct, though artless and unaffected, elegance are its very obvious embellishments.

But besides this general character of Scriptural language, it is still further diversified by certain peculiarities of style, which are common to the Sacred with other writers. The most striking of these deserve notice; and first, the great Apostle of the Gentiles furnishes us with a conciseness and energy of expression, with a quick and short, yet comprehensive, turn of sentence, and with a nervous manner, which Thucydides himself might envy: this more especially appears in his epistles, through which to pursue him requires the full bent and exertion of the mind: and yet it is not soon weary, nor has either cause or inclination to complain of dryness of precept; as his works are adorned and interspersed, to great advantage, with all the graces of metaphor, allusion and allegory; so that the characteristic

characteriſtic of St. Paul's ſtyle ſeems to be, ſtrength and beauty united. Contrary to this cloſe and maſculine oratory, which appears as it were ready girt up for exerciſe and action, is that looſe, flowing, and negligent ſpecies of it, that runs into longer meaſures, and ſpreads itſelf with a ſort of wild and pleaſing luxuriancy, and ſuch, as it is naturally the language of ſorrow; ſo belongs to the Prophet Jeremy. The variegated repetition of the ſame Sentiment, and gradually heightened colouring, the pathetic exclamation, and vehemence and redundancy of language ſweetly diſtinguiſh him from the other inſpired penmen, and moſt happily accord with his mournful ſubjects. Again, in the hiſtorical parts of the new Teſtament we meet with a clear and unadorned plainneſs of words, which ſeems to promiſe the truth, it delivers to us; and on this account it may be deemed the moſt proper ſtyle for narration.

But with what a ſuperior dignity and ſimple grandeur is the Diction of the evangelical Prophet fraught? In what a rich garment, how thickly crowded with bright images, tropes and figures, are his truly ſublime and vigorous ideas habited? Æſchylus is no longer bold and daring in his expreſſions, when compared with Iſaiah, who rolls them on in a rapid and continued ſucceſſion, whilſt the other at intervals only breaks forth into them: and what are they in the Grecian, but faint and ſickly glimmerings of light, that caſt a tranſient gleam over the ſky, before the ſun ariſe upon the morn? But the Jewiſh writer, like the noon-day ſun, ſhines forth in full brightneſs and ſplendor; nor need we look further than to the difference of their ſubjects, in order to ſee the reaſon, why that fire of imagination, which has ſubjected the Tragedian to

ſome

ſome cenſure, blazes out in the Prophet with ſo general applauſe and approbation: It is becauſe the ſenſe of the one ſeems often overſtrained, and will not bear the image applied, whereas ſo great and glorious is the matter of the other, that to treat it in a leſs exalted manner, would be to diſgrace it, and the only danger was, leſt throughout the whole range of Diction, no words could be found ſtrong enough to convey an adequate ſenſe of his conceptions.

This remark gives riſe to a very natural obſervation, which is, that the language of the Eaſt, both as it is foreign from common diſcourſe, and on account of its affinity to the poetic ſtyle, and its peculiar majeſty, was therefore admirably ſuited and qualified to reveal God unto man; for it helps that imperfection of ideas, under which a finite being muſt neceſſarily labour, when he would conceive of an Infinite One, and ſerves to fill the mind with a general ſenſe of what cannot be known particularly or fully. And Iſaiah need only be read, that it may appear, how well he hath availed himſelf of ſo favourable a circumſtance.

Indeed moſt of the Sacred Writers among the Jews, made great uſe of it. Thus, where plain and proper words would not anſwer their conceptions, they have recourſe to ſelect tropes and lively metaphors, and often repreſent them by means of theſe, in a ſtronger and better light, than the mere literal expreſſions could have admitted. Is the truſt which a good man repoſes in Jehovah to be ſhewn? the words are, "God is my rock." Is exceeding plenty to be promiſed? Then, "the valleys ſtand ſo thick with corn, that they ſhall laugh and ſing:" And ſo in numberleſs other inſtances, the

moſt ſenſible and pleaſing images are ſet before our view, which tend equally to illuſtrate and adorn the ſenſe.

In fine, there is ſcarce any ſtriking beauty, either in ſtyle or expreſſion, with which ſcriptural diction does not ſeem to be enriched, it addreſſes itſelf ſometimes to the judgment, ſometimes to the imagination; it here deſcends with dignity, and there riſes to the moſt ſublime heights with propriety; it has likewiſe this leading feature and characteriſtic, that while it ſtoops to the meaneſt underſtanding, it ſatisfies at the ſame time the niceſt and moſt cultivated taſte; for ſurely he that undervalues the language of the Bible, can make no better pretenſions to true taſte, than he can to chriſtianity, who denies its doctrines.

The Sentiment and Diction of Scripture having been thus found worthy of each other; we proceed next to the Regularity of Plan, that more ſecret and retired fund of Literary Beauty, which is known to them only who take a comprehenſive view of things. For a man may ſtudy the various parts of a good author, examine them one by one with the utmoſt accuracy, and yet continue a perfect ſtranger to this inlet of pleaſure, unleſs he likewiſe conſider each part, ſo examined, with a reference to the whole, and obſerve with what ſecret art they all conſpire towards the end at firſt propoſed. Whence the mind is delighted with ſuch a general ſurvey, whether from its love of order and perfection, or not, is by no means the buſineſs of this Eſſay to enquire: certain it is, that men of letters derive great inward ſatisfaction from the contemplation of a well conducted work: and hence we find the admiration of the critics, which had been raiſed by the language and ſentiment

timent of Homer, encreaſed even to a degree of Enthuſiaſm, when they turn their attention towards his invention and method, and prepare to weigh his merits in a larger ſcale. For the ſubject of his poem is ſo well laid, the conduct of it ſo wiſe and regular, the epiſodes interwoven into it with ſuch art and ingenuity, the characters kept ſo diſtinct, the firſt grand object ſo conſtantly reſpected, and all the different circumſtances lead towards it with ſuch an eaſy and imprecepti-ble tendency, and in ſhort, ſuch nice ſymmetry and admirable connection runs through the whole, that the eye of the moſt rigid criticiſm, which turned to it at firſt perhaps to diſcover faults, cannot help gazing on it with delight and aſtoniſhment.

If human Plans be attended with this powerful effect, what may we not expect from a divine one? It is therefore propoſed to ſee whether there be not likewiſe this ſource of Literary Beauty in the ſcriptures. And who can for a moment doubt it, if he has ever beſtowed a proper conſideration on the Bible, and not blindly received and owned it, without knowing the value of the Gift? Perhaps, in a ſpiritual light, the only advantage which the learned man has over the illiterate, is, that he can gain larger and more complete views of that religion, which they both in common enjoy, and thus become more ſenſible of its grandeur and goodneſs. Shall he then forfeit or neglect this ſuperior privilege? eſpecially as the declarations of the Inſpired Writers concerning the true and living God obtain additional ſtrength and confirmation, from the obſervation of his operations and providences. For who can derive from the deſcriptions of Holy Writ ſo lively a ſenſe of the Wiſdom of Jehovah, as is impreſſed on the ſoul of him, that hath accuſtomed himſelf to ſearch out the depths of it; to reflect on

the wonderous dealings of God with man; and to ſeek the myſterious clew, by which he may trace the counſels of the Moſt High?

Nor need we be at a loſs for aſſiſtance in this reſpect, if we will but uſe, what is put into our hands. The word of Life not only proclaims the terms of Salvation, but likewiſe diſcloſes every thing relating to it. It ſhews us equally the nature of the chriſtian diſpenſation, and the preparation for it, and points out no leſs the grand ſcheme of Redemption, than its certainty. But too many reſt ſatisfied with the aſſurance of the Gift, and care not to exalt the Giver; whereas it ſhould conſtitute no ſmall part of the ſtudies of every learned Chriſtian to contemplate the whole body of Divinity, which is contained in the Scriptures, and to bring into one view, as it were, all the various parts of the Almighty Plan.

Let us ſuppoſe ſuch an one ſo employed! He would find the Bible to be the work of one Divine Author, though carried on at different periods and through the medium of human inſtruments: he would ſee it in Geneſis commencing with the beginning, and in the Apocalypſe cloſing with the end of Time. Having impreſſed his mind with this ſenſe of its Origin and Extent, he would naturally be led to look for that Unity of Deſign, and General Purpoſe of Subject, which, as it is the moſt diſtinguiſhing mark of underſtanding amongſt men, cannot but be expected of their Maker. Upon the firſt opening of the writings of Moſes, after a ſhort, yet important, detail of Adam's primitive happineſs, and his fall from it, the grand object of all the ſucceeding counſels of God is at once propoſed, and conſiſts in the reſtoration of man to his favour

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and to that purity and thoſe privileges, which, in the perſon of his firſt Parents, he forfeited. "The ſeed of the woman ſhall bruiſe the ſerpent's head" are the words of this precious promiſe, and not obſcurely intimate the nature of that wonderful Redemption, which was to be worked out for us: and indeed ſuch is it, as no leſs glorifies the Author, than bleſſes the receiver of it: it is a great deep of wiſdom and mercy, in which we are loſt with pleaſing wonder and aſtoniſhment.

After ſome pauſe here for juſt meditation on the Riches of the Divine Goodneſs, and on the Salvation itſelf, he would proceed to a conſideration of the manner in which it was publiſhed abroad among the nations. He would preſently obſerve that the firſt ſtep, taken towards this aim, was the election of the Jews from out of the midſt of an idolatrous world, miſerably ſunk in vice and ignorance; for they were elected, that they might know and ſerve the true God, and prepare mankind for the reception of the heavenly Meſſenger, who was ſoon to viſit them on the moſt gracious errand. He would perceive all their religious rites and ceremonies directed uniformly and bearing reference to the Grand Event, for which they were meant as an introduction.

If he look to their prophecies, which gradually unfolded more and more of the purpoſes of Jehovah, he would with pleaſure trace in them the encreaſing light of Revelation; if to their types, uſed by themſelves indeed to commemorate "things of old;" but præſignifying likewiſe "greater things to come;" he muſt reverently bow down before that Wiſdom, which could ſo connect this comprehenſive Plan of Mercy with the

Duty

Duty of a people, as to make the performance of the one, the promotion of the other: and laſtly, if he look to the Lord's proceedings with them, which are emblematical of what every true Chriſtian experiences, (for ſuch an one like the Iſraelites, paſſes from bondage into liberty, from the Egypt of ſin, into the Canaan of righteouſneſs) he will be aſtoniſhed at the diverſity of intentions, which the Jewiſh Oeconomy is ordained to anſwer. Then carrying on his eye into the dawn of Chriſtianity, with what a ſtrong admiration would he behold the means loſt in the end, each type meet with its antitype, and every prophecy with its completion! The time, place, and character of the Meſſias, ſo exactly anſwered; the admiſſion and influx of the Gentiles into the Church, the forcible atteſtation of miracles, the pouring out of the ſpirit, promiſed ſo many ages before, and in ſhort, that univerſal concord, beauty, and harmony, which exiſts in every point of view between the Jewiſh and Chriſtian diſpenſations, would all contribute in the higheſt degree to raiſe his ideas of the Scriptures, and of the moſt wiſe methods which God has taken, to point out unto ſinners their Saviour.

Having thus come down to his own preſent ſtate and condition, he will find the primitive deſign of redemption brought into effect, and realized. Yet he muſt not ſtop here; for the Kingdom of Chriſt, though begun, is not yet perfected, and wants much of that univerſality even in theſe days, which it is finally to attain; "The joyful ſound of ſalvation is indeed gone forth," but not into the ends of the world; mankind is only partially reſtored, and expects its promiſed fulneſs of bliſs in futurity. He will therefore ſee Jehovah ſtill engaged in aiding and advancing his own great project, and making the cauſe

cauſe " of his only begotten Son " to flouriſh in the midſt of enemies and perſecutors; he will learn to prize more particularly that Religion, which as a citizen of this happy country he has received equally pure from deluſion, and unſtained by blood; and encouraged by the continued protection that it has hitherto, derived from heaven, and is aſſured of through all ages, he will go beyond the preſent ſtate of things, and ſetting aſide all intermediate events, anticipate the predicted concluſion of this vaſt and extenſive work of mercy; a work, which is to end, not like Virgil's, with the ſettling a ſmall people in Italy, but with the gathering of, " all the ſeed of the faithful," throughout all lands and generations into the new Jeruſalem, the holy city, " wherein dwelleth Righteouſneſs," and with the full reſtoration of man to a ſecond Eden, better than the firſt, and to a far higher ſtate of happineſs and glory, than that, which Sin deſtroyed. What a ſubject for contemplation is this, how auguſt and intereſting! It is ſuch as cannot fail of inſpiring the moſt animated and devout reverence.

And when he has thus purſued the great Goſpel ſcheme, when he has ſeen the hand of God " bringing mighty things to paſs," and conducting his benevolent and gracious purpoſes with the moſt unerring and aſtoniſhing wiſdom, at ſuch a time into what inſignificance do the little plans of the moſt exalted writers ſhrink in his ſight; human learning for a moment loſes its uſual conſequence with him, and all its higheſt efforts only ſerve to prove the more fully that infinite diſtance, which there is between the Creature and the Creator.

And if the mind is wont to receive great pleaſure from a grand and extenſive view of nature, with what ſenſations muſt it

it be tranſported, when the man, like Moſes in the mount of Sinai, is thus brought into nearer converſe with his God, becomes as it were, a partaker of his counſels, and has his proſpects bounded only by eternity! The ſoul, which was formed for immortality, triumphs here and exults, as if in ſight of its native home, and declares its origin by its joy; particularly if it be under the influence of Religion, it is filled with a pure delight, a rapturous foretaſte of heavenly bliſs.

Thus, I truſt, has the literary claim of the Scriptures been made out; and may it be allowed univerſally! Conſidered collectively together through the whole of both Teſtaments, they form, if I may ſo ſay, one grand Epic, they concur uniformly in one and the ſame ſcheme and view, and are all the work of one author, God. The Sentiment accordingly is of ſuch excellence and purity, the Diction of ſuch force and energy, and the Plan ſo glorious and intereſting, that they cannot fail of ſupplying the richeſt feaſts of intellectual pleaſure to cultivated and poliſhed minds.

But this is by no means the only, or beſt fruit of Sacred ſtudy: for taſte here does not, as in other things, play uſeleſsly about the head, and delight the imagination only, but deſcends likewiſe into the heart, warms and intereſts the whole man, and influences all his actions; and thus the elegances of Literature and graces of Religion go hand in hand, and the Scholar is compleated in the Chriſtian.

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